



STORIES • REFLECTION • LEARNING

Working with **local people** to act on the
things that **matter most** to **communities**



“Communities are full of people who can provide the connections that make their neighbourhood stronger. People thrive in communities that are well connected.”

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Background

Neighbourhoods that Work was a £3.1m, 5-year partnership initiative, led by Great Yarmouth Borough Council with seven partner organisations which ran between 2015 and 2020. NTW aimed to connect local communities to the benefits of economic growth by increasing community resilience, by improving the responsiveness of Voluntary Sector support services and by increasing the participation of communities in driving forward sustainable economic development.

Our vision was simple: We worked with local residents to build stronger communities. Our work focused on people, neighbourhoods, and the things that matter most.

The programme centred on Community Development approaches to working with local people, in the places they live, to identify and act upon things that matter most to them. NTW built upon 15 years of work in Great Yarmouth, growing existing and award-winning community development infrastructure, incorporating active and engaged local residents, neighbourhood boards and an array of varied and diverse community and voluntary organisations. These continue to be supported by a range of resources from the Borough Council and partners, coupled with the willingness and need to transform amongst those who locally provide services to the public.

An Asset Based Approach

The NTW approach was unique in being 'place-focused', and 'asset-based' from the outset. We knew people don't exist according to theme or category. Instead people live in neighbourhoods where there are multiple ages, backgrounds, strengths, capabilities, and where with the right enabling environment,

people can be supported to create thriving communities. This vision was transformational in itself, resulting in the largest ever revenue award from the National Lottery Community Fund at that time.



Values and Language

Introducing people to colleagues, often done in person, rather than referring them, changed the way people accessed a service. Calling people 'residents' rather than 'clients', 'cases', or 'service users', enabled an important shift to happen; from seeing people as passive recipients of support, to individual human beings with a range of interests, skills and talents. This meant that workers were able to recognise and nurture people's strengths to achieve sustainable outcomes, instead of only focussing on what's wrong and doing a quick fix.

We learned that language matters. We used 'resident' rather than 'client', and 'introduction' rather than 'referral'.





Neighbourhoods That Work Theory of Change

Our Theory of Change (ToC) shows how an individual can be supported within their community to develop personal resilience through engaging in personal and community self-help networks, through accessing the right support services early, and through being supported to develop skills and capabilities to increase employability.

Importantly the ToC

- Embraces the complexity of everyday life.
- Demonstrates that progress is not always linear- there are always ups and downs.
- Acknowledges that every person is unique, and so then is their journey, their support needs and the way a sustained outcome is achieved- there are no blueprints.
- Identifies, nurtures and supports strengths.

The NTW theory of change follows the journey of 'Sarah'. When we first met Sarah she was receiving multiple, high cost, interventions from statutory services (bottom left hand corner in blue). Her first encounters with NTW connectors (in green) lead to her gaining information about the local youth club which Sarah's children started attending.

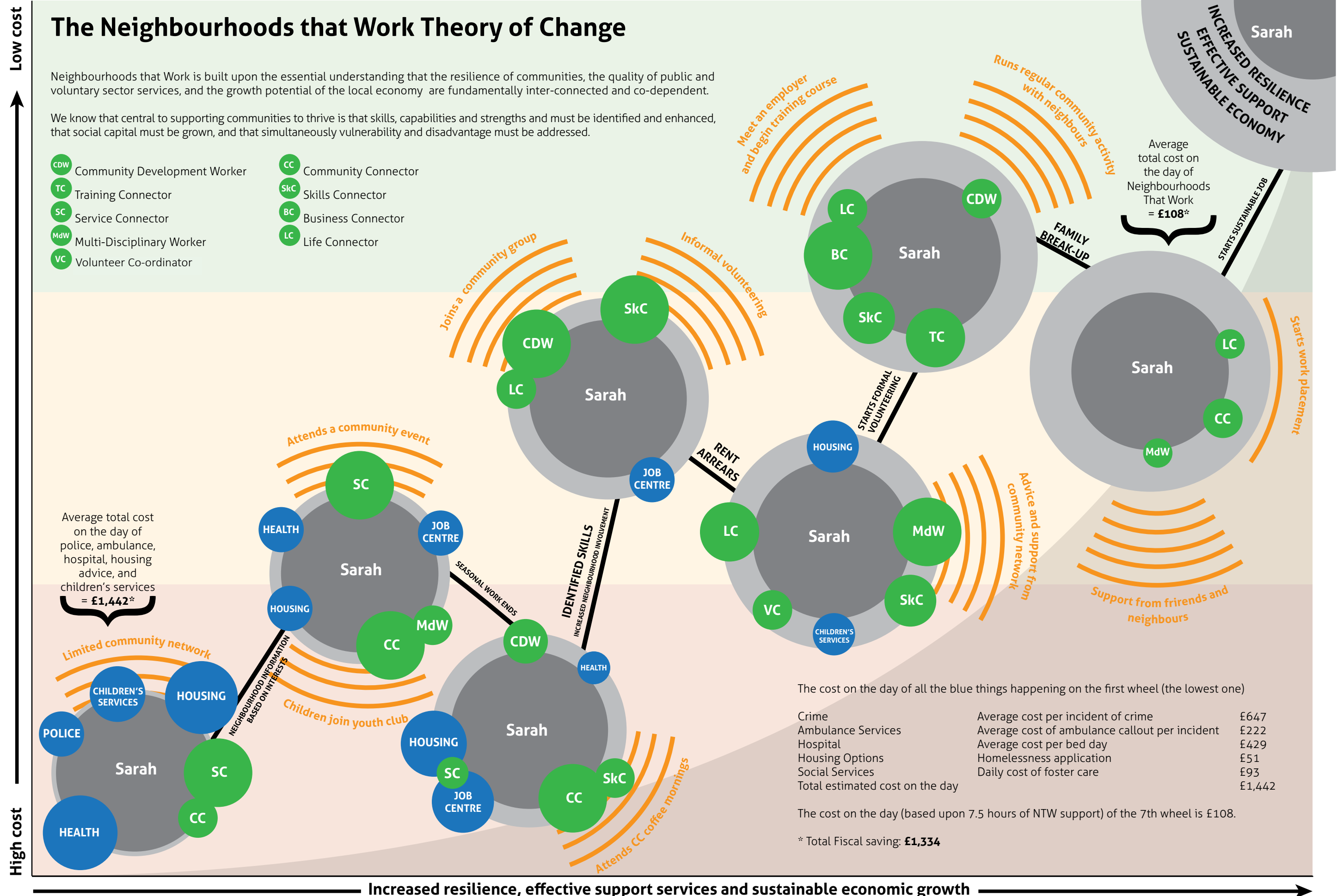
Over time and with the support of a number of connectors Sarah's reliance on statutory services declined and her natural support network of friends and community links grew. This didn't stop the difficult times happening, with down slides such as rent arrears and a relationship break up, but it meant that Sarah was better able to cope using her personal and community resilience (light grey) increasing over time.

The Neighbourhoods that Work Theory of Change

Neighbourhoods that Work is built upon the essential understanding that the resilience of communities, the quality of public and voluntary sector services, and the growth potential of the local economy are fundamentally inter-connected and co-dependent.

We know that central to supporting communities to thrive is that skills, capabilities and strengths must be identified and enhanced, that social capital must be grown, and that simultaneously vulnerability and disadvantage must be addressed.

- CDW Community Development Worker
- TC Training Connector
- SC Service Connector
- MdW Multi-Disciplinary Worker
- VC Volunteer Co-ordinator
- CC Community Connector
- SkC Skills Connector
- BC Business Connector
- LC Life Connector



Increased resilience, effective support services and sustainable economic growth

How it works

The programme was delivered by a team of 'connectors' based in 3 geographical patches plus a wider connector network

Roles

Community Connectors:

Building relationships with local people by proactively engaging in natural locations (e.g. school gates, corner shop, parks). They find out what matters to people and connect them to other local residents, activities and support services, if needed.

Community Development Workers:

Working with residents to develop events, activities, projects, and community groups to benefit their neighbourhood: the approach focuses on growing strengths and capabilities, collective action and social justice.

Life Connectors:

Providing one to one support to people who need a bit of help to enable them to overcome complex life challenges and build personal resilience.

Multi-Disciplinary Workers:

Providing dedicated, specialist advice and guidance on debt, benefits, housing and wider support needs. Support is provided on a one to one level, and links people to community-based groups.

Service Connectors:

A transformational role, exploring new and better ways to ensure that local people with complex life challenges are able to gain supported access to the right services at the right time.

Volunteer Coordinator:

Recruiting, supporting and training volunteers across the project, matching interests with skills and developing new opportunities.

Training Connector:

Developing tailored and innovative training and learning opportunities, by matching the interests of individuals with the development of skills highlighted by local employers as entry-level requirements into local jobs.

Skills Connectors:

Working with people to identify skills, talents and ambitions, and matching these with opportunities that will improve their work readiness and employment chances e.g. soft skills workshops, volunteering, work placements, training courses.

Business Transformation Lead:

Supporting communities and businesses to work together, creating work placement opportunities for long term unemployed residents and recruiting Business connectors to pool their skills within neighbourhood teams.

The Three Patches

MESH
BRINGING GORLESTON TOGETHER

Neighbourhood Team

Neighbourhood Manager
Community Development
Worker
Community Connectors
Life Connector
Skills Connector

Comeunity
LOCAL ISSUES, LOCAL SOLUTIONS

Neighbourhood Team

Neighbourhood Manager
Community Development
Worker
Community Connectors
Life Connector
Skills Connector

Make it Happen
In Cobholm, Southtown and Halfway House

Neighbourhood Team

Neighbourhood Manager
Community Development
Worker
Community Connectors
Life Connector
Skills Connector

The wider connector network

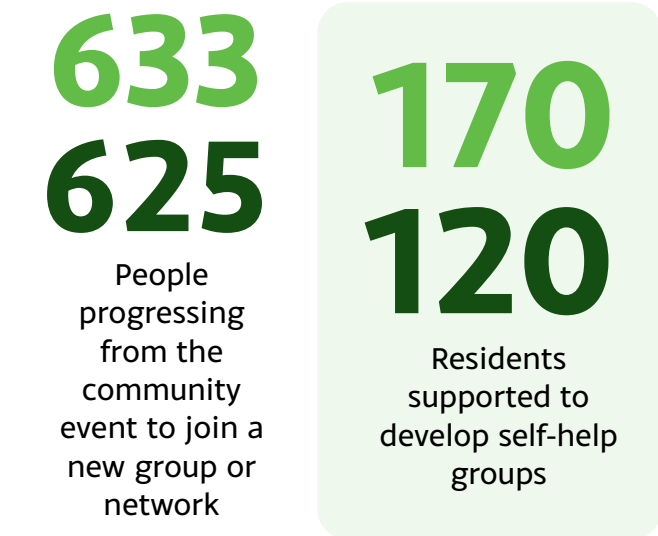
Volunteer
Co-ordinator
Service
Connectors
Multi-Disciplinary
Workers
Training
Connector
Business
Transformation
Manager / Lead

Resilient Communities

Outcome: The social connections and the capacity of individuals and communities to mobilise to address local issues and needs will strengthen and increase.

The approach has focussed on creating the conditions for community-led self-help. NTW increased the resilience of neighbourhoods, with more prevention work provided by communities themselves.

Community Development Workers helped groups to design and apply for funding for local projects resulting in an additional **£1.5m** of grant funding coming into the borough. Local services become more responsive, as community self-help groups were recognised as integral, and not simply an add-on, to delivery. Community Development Workers and Community Connectors ran and supported community led events where residents and their families met, made new friends, had a good time and were introduced to support services in relaxed settings.



'The strength and connectedness of communities, the quality and accessibility of support services, and economic growth potential are all interconnected and interdependent. Places can't thrive unless all these areas are working.'
Great Yarmouth Borough Council



A Case Study: Little Stars Parent and Toddler Group

The Little Stars parent and toddler group was a new group that started running from Cobholm Community Centre as the result of collaboration between the Make it Happen team, Community Capacity Coordinators at Norfolk County Council and local residents.

A Children's Services Early Help Community Capacity Coordinator identified that there were no parent and toddler groups in Cobholm, and so she contacted the Community Development Worker and a Community Connector at the Make it Happen team. The Community Connector mentioned that she knew of a couple of parents who may be interested in having a group. The Children's Services Early Help Community Capacity Coordinator consulted with local parents and some expressed an interest in both having a group and helping to run it.

Make it Happen agreed to fund the hire of Cobholm Community Centre from an Awards for All grant given to Voluntary Norfolk for Connector activity for a period to see how the group developed. The residents promoted the group amongst their own networks and took ownership of the group.

On the group's first session in early October (2016) there were ten parents who came with their children. They reported really enjoying the group. It is conveniently located for families in Cobholm and allows parents to meet new people and address shared challenges in a way that fits in with their childcare responsibilities. The group has grown in size significantly. The Community Connector and Community Development Worker continued to support the group to develop and grow.

'The joining to our community centre has given me and my family better life in Great Yarmouth. It is important for me as a foreigner and very important for my family.'

Great Yarmouth resident

Skills and Employability

Skills connectors, the training connector and the volunteer co-ordinator helped individuals to identify their interests and skills, created 'taster' sessions in local workplaces and within community projects for people who are long-term unemployed and supported volunteering and work placements, in order to help people into sustainable work.

They worked alongside the BBO programme at East Coast College and with local businesses to create new opportunities for work. For those currently not ready, volunteering helped people gain confidence before they applied for paid work.

Outcome: People further away from the labour market will be accessing supported training opportunities matched to their skills and interests and employer needs. People will be in sustainable employment in a vibrant local economy.



Achievement
Target

805
750

People report improvement in level of skills, and confidence in use of skills, following completion of at least one training session

158
150

People will have overcome issues preventing them from getting and holding down a job, resulting in them sustaining employment

283 200

People with complex needs report improved confidence competing for jobs following at least one volunteer position/'taster' day/ work placement

Paula's Story

'I knew straightaway that the team at MESH would help me regain my confidence and independence, and they haven't let me down!'

Paula has worked in shops all her life. Her friendly, bubbly personality and conscientious nature makes her the perfect fit and she loves this type of work. Most recently Paula worked in a shop in Yarmouth town centre selling quality chocolates.

A traumatic set of events occurred in Paula's life; the shop closed down, Paula was taken seriously ill and required major surgery and she lost her husband. She hit an all-time low. Her confidence suffered and she began to experience anxiety. The doctor was able to help with counselling and medication, but Paula knew that the MESH office was another place she could seek support, because she had worked with Skills Connector Donna during an earlier episode of unemployment. Paula went to MESH and had a conversation with Community Development Worker Alan about the impact the bereavement had on her granddaughter and he introduced her to Norfolk based charity Nelson's Journey, who were able to help her through this difficult time.

Paula was receiving Employment Support Allowance because she had been assessed as too unwell to work. However it was stopped suddenly and she needed to apply for Universal Credit. She didn't have a computer or IT skills. Her children helped set up her account but she still needed help from Donna to keep on top of the online requirements of UC. Life Connector Nancy supported her if Donna wasn't available. Donna introduced Paula to Training Connector Tim, and she completed the IT Beginners course, giving her more independence when managing her UC account.

Paula's health slowly began to improve and she became able to manage her mental health. Although not ready for the responsibility of paid employment, Paula wanted to work, making volunteering an ideal option. Donna helped Paula explore volunteering opportunities she settled on working in the Barnardo's charity shop a natural fit and a job she loves.

Paula was still required to sign on at Job Centre Plus (JCP) but her work coach, Ros, had a good relationship with both Paula and Donna. Ros recognised that Paula was working towards employment at a pace appropriate to her health and wellbeing and was in full support of the work she was doing with Donna. Paula really wanted a paid job to come up, in the meantime she did all she could to make the shop a success. Her contribution was highly valued by the shop manager.

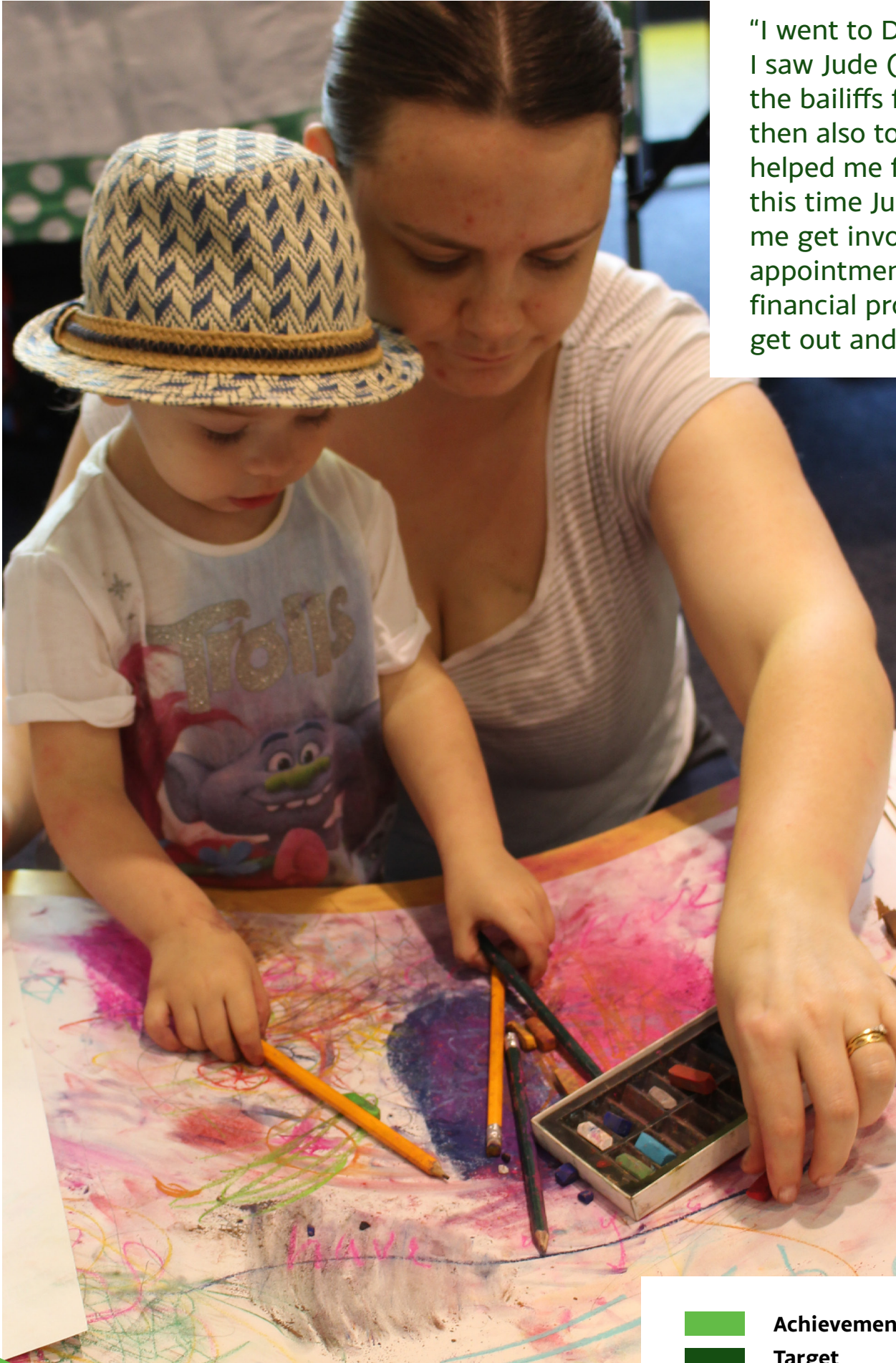


Service Transformation

Outcome: People with multiple and complex needs will get the help they need by having access to more responsive specialist services. The services provided by local organisations will be transformed by recognising and valuing the benefit of working with communities.

In a competitive funding environment both statutory and voluntary sector services need to find ways to better engage with the communities they serve and find different ways to deliver those service in ways which build resilience thus reducing long-term dependency. NTW's place-based approach meant that connectors from different organisations were co-located with the express intention of working in more collaborative ways. Barriers to services were broken through the work of connectors.

NTW established a single point of contact into services for people with complex life circumstances through Life Connectors and Multi-Disciplinary Workers. Gaps in services and blocks to access were identified by Service Connector and the Transformation Lead applied this learning at a strategic level.



"I went to DIAL for some help as I had bailiffs knocking on my door and I saw Jude (Multidisciplinary Worker). Jude was really nice and spoke to the bailiffs for me and helped me make an arrangement with them. I then also told her about a notice seeking possession of my house. Jude helped me fill in all the forms to get this suspended, which it was. During this time Jude told me about Life Connectors and how they could help me get involved with things in the community and to help me get to appointments. I am still working with Jude and she is helping with my financial problems as well as introducing me to people that can help me get out and about more." - **Local Resident**



Commissioners and grant making bodies aligning resources to the project



 Achievement
 Target



Doris's Story

I met Sean and was able to turn my life around; I want my story to give others hope

Doris had experienced two family bereavements and a relationship breakdown. Her support networks had been eroded and she found herself homeless, suffering from depression and dependent on alcohol. As she didn't have an address Doris couldn't claim benefits, so she had no money at all. She was feeling pretty desperate and she didn't know where to turn, but Doris had heard about the Swap Stop at the Middlegate Hut, so she went along. She fell into conversation with one of the volunteers there and someone else made her a cup of tea. After a while, Life Connector Sean came along and someone introduced him to Doris; she says this was the turning point in her life.

Sean started to work with Doris as she rebuilt her life. Within a few weeks they had found Doris a place to live and she had applied for Universal Credit. Sean introduced Doris to Marius at DIAL and they began to manage her debts. Doris continued going along to the Swap Stop and it helped her furnish her new home.

Sean introduced Doris to Training Connector Tim. Together they went to F1 Training, where Doris started working towards qualifications that will enable her to apply for work. She also regularly attends community events such as Neighbourhood Lunches and has become part of the Swap Stop volunteer team, where she can contribute ideas from her previous experience working in a charity shop. Having gained some stability in her life Sean has introduced Doris to Skills Connector Daniel and they plan to make a start on writing her CV.

Doris now has new support networks, she says 'everyone is working together with me'. Initially this was the Neighbourhoods That Work team, but now the Swap Stop regulars have become her friends, whilst the people who work and volunteer at Comeunity are still always there if she needs something. Nowadays Doris likes to support other people who are living through tough times, with a kind word or deed, or by introducing them to someone who she knows can help.

Doris enjoys helping others and wants to find work in one of the caring professions. She has lived through some difficult times and wants to use her experiences in a positive way. She says 'if I can help one person get back to where they belong it will be worth the struggle'.

Challenges and Learning

7 Partners

Front-line connectors were employed by seven partners. GYBC Neighbourhood Managers led the teams on the frontline, and the partners, the employing organisations, were responsible for target achievement, performance, and pastoral care. Making this complicated picture work was tough. The experience of working through it together however has been highly valuable; it reduced competition between the organisations and workers learnt a lot about each other's roles and organisations. Inter-organisational, personal centred, collaborative approaches to supporting people became the norm.

Measurement/ Capturing the data in a meaningful way

Whilst we had numerical targets, we knew that we were particularly interested in the

backstory to target achievement- the nuance, the 'little differences that made the difference'. Capturing this kind of data in a useable form was a huge challenge. After much searching, NTW developed its own bespoke database, recording a huge range of activity from multiple individual contacts to group events. The content is detailed and intricate, but its subsequent complexity and density has made it a challenge to analyse. Importantly however, we ensured that through capturing 'what was significant' for a person, allowed us to gradually track the progression in individuals and the stories of community development, rather than just count the number.

Changes

Since 2015 both political and executive leadership in Great Yarmouth Borough Council have changed. Changes in senior management resulted in a loss of senior organisational

memory, but a change in personnel also brought new ideas and insights. Changes in partner organisation strategic personnel have impacted and created change over the programme's lifecycle. However, with a good level of operational and strategic continuity within the programme, NTW has been able to grow, adapt deliver, and diversify - highlighting the value of relationships.

Complexity

Recognising the complexity of situations and responding appropriately requires flexibility and adaptability. The context in which social support and interventions are undertaken is constantly changing, so it was crucial that the NTW framework was flexible enough to reflect and adapt to change, in order for the right support to be given and received. The Lottery has been supportive of this way of working from the start, uniquely enabling the

programme and the funder to experience the journey together.

Bespoke solutions are possible

Neighbourhoods That Work has supported thousands of people - every story has a unique set of activities that enabled a positive outcome for a person.

Collaboration

Collaboration between partners is now the norm. Organisations are much more likely to run projects together, call on each other for complementary activity, and compete less for funding opportunities through joint work. Equally, this collaboration has enabled smaller VCSEs to access large scale funding, such as European Social Fund, through collaborating with bigger VCSEs and institutions like the college.



Evaluation and Impact

The outcomes of the programme were identified through targets, all of which were met or exceeded over the lifetime of the programme. For a full examination of the programme's results see the Final Evaluation document ([link](#)).

The NTW Programme has been successful in improving the lives of so many people across the three target areas. In total, the estimated net economic impact (GVA) of the project is just over £750,000. In addition, additional tax-payer savings from a reduction in employment related benefit is estimated at £584,241, with housing benefit savings of a further £204,205 per annum. On a local level, sustained employment has increased Council Tax generation by £22,624 per annum through a reduction in non-working households.

Through direct action – advice, support, advocating – often in areas 'between the cracks' of mainstream service provision, they have generated significant added value.

Our independent evaluation has calculated that the overall social and economic impact generated is circa £16.5m over the 5 years.

What Neighbourhoods That Work has achieved can be expressed in different ways, some quantifiable, some less so. The NTW Programme has made a significant impact supporting people, including some of the most vulnerable people with nowhere else to turn. NTW has had a significant impact on the design and delivery of services across both statutory and voluntary sectors in Great Yarmouth.



COVID-19

The Community's Response to COVID - 19
When COVID19 came it proved to be the ultimate test of community resilience. NTW frontline workers, alongside community leaders, mobilised within hours of the looming lockdown.

- Using existing relationships and community development expertise, Community Development Workers facilitated the effective set up and running of mutual aid

groups to support residents and groups in the borough.

- In the first 2-3 weeks of operation the groups achieved several outcomes, supporting over 2,500 people to access Early Help services, to gain direct support within their local community, and practically supporting and guiding over 20 community-based self-help groups, enabling them to co-ordinate responses effectively and safely.

Our Legacy

We are proud that Neighbourhoods That Work has been influential, largely due to the success of the connector roles, and the subsequent resilience that has been created in our communities, but also the extent to which other organisations and programmes have adopted parts of the approach. Highlights include:

- The Building Better Opportunities funded 'Norfolk Community College' led by East Coast College modelled itself on NTW, featuring neighbourhood focused skills connector, life connector, training connector and business connector work.
- Recognising the value of neighbourhood-based delivery, Youth and Community workers were aligned to NTW neighbourhood teams via the Youth Investment Fund programme, delivered by local youth charity Mancroft Advice Project.
- Local social prescribing activity was originally modelled via a NTW based pilot, exploring the 'connector roles' and how they could best interact with local GP

services. The subsequent service design was eventually modelled on the NTW Life connector experience, with commissioned delivery undertaken by VCSE partners DIAL and MIND, with the social prescribing activity linking into the Community development and Community Connector activity at the grass roots.

- The local Citizen's Advice branch developed a brand new role, based on the NTW's 'whole person' approach and emulating the function of the life and service connector roles.
- In addressing loneliness and isolation, commissioned through Norfolk County Council, 'Better Together Norfolk' centred the delivery approach on a team of Life Connectors supported by a Community Development worker to create and sustain capacity within local community groups.
- Shrublands Trust launched the 'Community Checkers' project, modelled directly on the NTW community connector activity, following the end of the NTW programme in 2020.



Useful Links

Neighbourhoods That Work Remote Study

Visit on September 25th, 2020

NTW programme

Gorleston Beach Clean

Great Yarmouth Train Station Renovation

Skippings Gallery

Make It Happen coffee morning and St John Ambulance training

The NTW Final Evaluation Report 2020

www.neighbourhoodsthatwork.org

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Great Yarmouth
and Waveney